

irresponsible commissioners, so long will scandals like that mentioned in the present citation occur.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CRIMES OF "HARMLESS" LUNATICS.

THE ideas of some medical superintendents of insane hospitals as to what constitutes a harmless lunatic are decidedly vague. Even from hospitals for the insane epileptics, hallucinated lunatics, and delusional paranoiacs are discharged as harmless.

A lunatic, for example, escaped from a Western hospital for the insane, "who was undoubtedly insane, though seemingly in the full possession of his intellectual faculties. His insanity showed itself mainly in three ways: first, a delusion that he was the possessor of a great property; second, a mania for writing love-letters and offering himself in marriage to all sorts and conditions of females; and, third, becoming blasphemously abusive and dangerously violent on the smallest fancied provocation. He wrote bushels of letters, but his correspondence with females was finally checked, owing to complaints, as the letters were, as a rule, of a most obscene character, and most of them were addressed to women whom he had never seen, but whose acquaintance had been made through personals in newspapers. He had proposed marriage in all cases, and in some had been accepted, the filthy writing notwithstanding. In one addressed to a woman he said he was the father of seventeen children and was in a hurry to be father of more. This woman had sent him her photograph. None of his letters to women were fit for publication. He imagined every one was trying to rob him, and would begin suit on the most trivial cause if he could get an attorney to take the case. Despite the clearly indicated delusions of a character likely to lead to results disastrous to society, very little effort had been made to recapture him, as according to the superintendent he was not dangerous except where he fancied wrong was being done him." This man sued out a writ of habeas corpus, and the superintendent, without letting the question come to an issue, thereupon discharged him.

Concerning this class of cases Dr. Godding says: "But they say

he is harmless. Ah, given the insane mind and the impulse to restless wanderings, who, not able to look into that man's inmost thought, or assign a limit to that thought's vagaries, or foresee into what possible situation his travels may bring him, will dare to say he is harmless? 'Harmless,' when speaking of lunatics at large in the community, is a rash word to use." He cites various instances of "harmless" lunatics infesting the capital, and the recent history of one of the cited instances demonstrates the truth of these remarks. A daily journal says:

"It appears that the incarceration of Col. M. Pinchover in the hospital for the insane asylum was done to prevent a possible tragedy that would have been almost as sensational as the Guiteau crime. Pinchover has been a harmless crank in Washington for fifteen years. His delusion was that he had been cheated out of a seat in Congress, and that certain public men had robbed him of millions. Mr. Randall was one of these, and for him he had conceived the most violent dislike. One day he appeared in the east corridor of the House end of the Capitol just as Mr. Randall was entering. He immediately assailed Mr. Randall in bitter terms, becoming so frantic that he had to be led out. Friends warned Mr. Randall that, though Pinchover was looked on as a harmless lunatic, he might some day do him serious bodily harm, and on their advice he consulted Police-Surgeon Bayne. In accordance with a prearranged plan Pinchover was coaxed to police head-quarters, where a medical examination was held, and Pinchover sent to the government hospital for the insane."

These facts are so trite as to scarcely need repetition, but the question arises: Who should be held responsible pecuniarily for the results of the violations of law by this class of the insane? The discharge of an hallucinated lunatic, an epileptic lunatic, or a delusional lunatic of the kind mentioned from an hospital for the insane is a clear instance of malpractice, and the superintendent and managers of the hospital for the insane should be held responsible for it.